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“THE LOTUS OF THE GOOD LAW”

LOTUS time in Kashmir comes in July, when the great flowers and leaves rise on their slender stalks three or four feet from the surface of the lake. They may be taken as the Hindu sacred flower, much as the rose is the first flower in the eyes of the secular Moslem poets; and all the world goes out to gaze on the bright pink lotus blooms. To see these flowers in perfection one must start at dawn, before the sun has climbed the mountain crags, and row out towards the Nishat Bagh, where the lake-side gardens are lost in dim blue shadows and the surface of the water is pearly grey and mauve. Then forcing the light shikara through the sweeping freshness of the large leaves until the boat is almost lost among them, wait till the sun wakes the lotus buds of Brahma. As their rose-dyed petal tips disclose the golden heart you will know why AUM, MANI PADME HUM (“Hail, Lord Creator! the Jewel is in the Lotus”) is the oldest and most sacred prayer in India.

The Hindus and Buddhists, with their wide sympathies and their simple, joyous love of nature, made much use of flowers in their religious ritual. Their monks and missionaries travelled far and wide, and with them the Lotus of the Good Law went voyaging into many lands. What the mihrab, Allah as a spirit, invisible, intangible, is to the Mohammedans, the Cross of Redemption to the Christians, the Lotus is to the Buddhist and Hindu. A lotus

floating on the cosmic waters is the symbol of the creation of the world. Three species of the flower grow in India: the *Nymphaea Lotus*, the white Lotus of ancient Egypt; the *Nymphaea caerulea*, the blue species; and the *Nelumbium speciosum*, the rose-coloured or sacred Lotus of India, which, Professor Joret believes, only entered Egypt in the times of the Ptolemies. Each colour is sacred to one aspect of the Trinity: the rose-petaled lotus—that of the Dal Lake—is the flower of sunrise, Brahma’s prayer; the blue flower is sacred to Vishnu, upholder of the blue noontide universe; the white lotus of evening is the flower of death and resurrection, the emblem of Siva, the Destroyer and Preserver.

On a Lotus the Good Law floated to Java, and its flowering can be seen to this day at Borobudur. It was carried south to Cambodia, and Angkor Wat is still the largest temple in the world. Northwards and eastwards the Sacred Lotus journeyed, and the wind and the covering sand followed in its wake; so that the road was well-nigh forgotten when Sir Aurel Stein found the frescoes of Vishnu’s dark blue flowers, and the little garden buried in the waste. Farther and farther the flower travelled till China and Japan owned its sway, and India, the home of the lotus, the land of Buddha and of Rama, is still the Holy Land of all the Further East.

The Indian Lotus-bearers reached China both through Turkestan and by

the southern route through Burmah and Cambodia, and "Coal Hill," near the Tartar city in Peking, is a relic of the Pleasure Hill idea. The style is supposed to have been introduced into Japan in the VI century by one Yohan Koan Han, who constructed great mounds, some of them a hundred feet high or more, and brought water in conduits to form lakes and ponds. These hills and rockeries were planted after the Indian fashion with flowering trees and shrubs. True, before this date the Japanese had a garden style called "Imperial Hall," from a famous royal garden, a quadrangle enclosed on three sides by palace buildings, but not much is known of the details of the style except that there was an irregular lake with an island and a little bridge connecting it with the shore. But the Plum and Orange tree right and left of the entrance to the palace are strangely

reminiscent of the ancient Hindu marriage of the fruit trees by the garden well. The flowers show still more strangely the persistence of the old ideas, for in a land of wonderful wild flowers half the gardens in Japan are green gardens, and, except for the blossoming trees and shrubs, the lotus in the pond, the iris fringing its margin, and the wisteria on the trellis overhead, all the garden flowers are in pots.

Far as the lotus travelled in Asia, its journeys were not completed there, for within recent years its spirit entered English gardens with the advent of the Japanese iris. Fresh points of view and a change of technique give an impetus to every art; details may with advantage be transplanted and transformed. The spirit of the lotus is even present in America. I have seen the lotus bloom in profusion in a pond on Cape Cod.